

Testimony of Cheryl Dence
Administrator, Char-Laine Manor

Re: H.B. No. 5037 (COMM) AN ACT ADJUSTING THE STATE BUDGET FOR THE BIENNIUM
ENDING JUNE 30, 2023.

Concerning

Department of Social Services Budget- Residential Care Home Funding

Appropriations Subcommittee on Human Services Public Hearing, February 23, 2022 Senator Osten, Representative Walker, Senator Miner, Representative France and Members of the Appropriations Subcommittee on Human Services, **thank you for the opportunity to offer testimony on the Department of Social Services Budget related to Residential Care Home Funding.**

My name is Cheryl Dence and I am the administrator at Char-Laine Manor located in Vernon. I am here today to raise concerns with the Governor's budget related to residential care homes and express the strong need for a rate increase for residential care homes throughout the state and an increase in wages for our employees.

My parents purchased this property in 1968 and ran it until 1992 when my husband Russell Dence and I bought it. We take care of 23 mentally challenged residents who are unable to live on their own. We do such tasks as meal preparation, medication supervision, housekeeping, laundry, arrange doctor appointments, arrange transportation for doctor appointments, facetime on the computer so residents could do their appointments and recreation. When Covid began, everything became a struggle, having residents and staff follow the guidelines which were changing often, the way we did things before COVID were definitely changing. Keeping up with what the state wanted us to do and getting everyone at our facility on the same page with proper protocols, the paperwork is so much more, it seems like everything is about paperwork that it takes time away from giving our residents the attention that they need at times. Staffing definitely became an issue where someone would quit and then we have to rehire them. Then they work a short while and never come back, which puts a strain on my staff that stayed as they were doing their job. My current staff went above and beyond on making sure Char-Laine Manor was running properly, there were many challenges. Trying to give support to my staff that did remain was critical, for my employees to give me support was critical as well, at times I did not know if I was going to make it as I was working close to 80 hours a week last summer. Myself and my current employees worked extremely hard and I worry that there are so many other jobs out there that offer more money for perhaps not as straining as working in a care facility.

Last year's biennium budget included a transfer of some residential care home spending to Medicaid. This shift was done to save the state money and provide residential care homes with much-needed resources. The plan is for residential care homes to become Medicaid billers starting April 1, 2022.

Despite our Association meeting with the Dept. of Social Services several times to discuss this there has been no operationalized plan for residential care homes to

become Medicaid billers. **These funds are critically important to our homes and employees who have been counting on the increased revenue to deal with the impact of the pandemic. We would urge the Appropriations Committee to ensure these dollars go to increasing residential care home rates!**

We value our employees who deserve so much more for the work they do for a challenging but rewarding population.

Unfortunately, paying employees the necessary wages to attract new people to our industry is almost impossible resulting in higher employee turnover. Our industry strives to employ people in long term careers so that they can establish and maintain relationships with our residents. This leads to better long-term health outcomes, stability in the home and savings to our state.

The inconsistent funding also challenges our business operations. We are constantly having to make repairs that are subject to state inspections and yet have virtually no margins to do so. Costs have and are consistently going up, electricity, gas, food, taxes for our home have gone up very high and with the rate frozen it is a challenging cost, insurances (property, liability, workman's comp and health insurance). Something has to give in order for our homes to stay in business. Where does one think residents in our homes would go if we all closed. Residential Care Homes have a purpose in the state of Connecticut which is taking care of clients that can not be on their own in the community, but do not qualify for nursing homes. Mental Health is a major disease which needs to be addressed much better than what it is, especially now that COVID has caused so many issues.

Unlike other providers during the pandemic, we did not see any federal funding to support our work or our employees. The Governor's proposal to enable residential care homes to bill Medicaid acknowledges the need for higher rates.

We provide a critical service for the state and care for some of the most vulnerable people. We do this for a low cost. My home and other residential care homes throughout the state have had to get by with rates failing to keep up with costs and yet we serve as the safety net for many people with mental health diagnoses and substance abuse issues. Unlike other providers, our residents are almost all state funded, limiting our ability to cost shift and make up for low rates.

Please support residential care home funding so that we can keep our great employees and pay them fairer wages while they care for some of the most vulnerable in the state.

Cheryl Dence Administrator

Char-Laine Manor Inc.

15 Ellington Ave.

Rockville, Connecticut 06066

(860) 872-4672